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ABSTRACT

An analysis of demographic data describing family stability among blacks and whites for the period 1950 to 1977 shows the following: (1) among both races a growing proportion of marriages end in divorce; (2) an increasing fraction of families--now about 33% of the black and 10% of the white--are headed by women; (3) there have been sharp increases in divorce and illegitimacy which have produced changes in the living arrangements of young children. Fewer are living with both their parents and a growing share live with the mother only. These trends point toward a shift away from family stability. Similar changes have occurred among both races, but the shifts have been greater among blacks. Racial differences on indicators of family stability are now larger than at previous dates. The changes in family structure which are revealed by the demographic data imply a shift away from a family system which appeared to maximize the economic well-being of women and children, and toward one which minimizes their economic well-being but maximizes that of men. (Author)

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What Happened in the Decade After the Moynihan Report?

A Look at Recent Trends in Family Structure Among Blacks and Whites

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Introduction

Just over a decade ago Moynihan wrote the report which, to this day, is the most frequently cited discussion of black families in the United States (U.S., Department of Labor, 1965). Moynihan, building upon the ideas of Frazier (1939), observed high rates of marital dissolution among blacks, the frequent heading of families by women and the numerous illegitimate births and then concluded that the deterioration of families was the fundamental source of weakness of the black community. In contrast he noted that white families achieved and maintained a high degree of stability (U.S., Department of Labor, 1965: 5).

The Moynihan report contains the following major arguments (for discussion and evaluation of that report see: Adams, 1971: 120-130; Billingsley, 1968: 198-207; Rainwater and Yancey, 1967).

First, there is a measurable aspect of family structure which he called family stability.

Second, whites and blacks differ on this dimension and among blacks, but not among whites, there has been a trend away from family stability.

Third, fluctuations in family stability among blacks are closely related to economic opportunities for men. Increases in unemployment, Moynihan showed, were matched by rises in family headship by women.

Fourth, instability in the family of origin depreciates the life chances of children. In Moynihan's words, Negro children without fathers flounder and fail (U.S., Department of Labor, 1965: 35).

Writers who comment about the Moynihan Report have asked why a topic as personal as family structure should be of interest. Ross and Sawhill (1975: 13) argue there are three reasons for the analysis of family composition. First, there is a welfare concern since families headed by a woman are much more likely to be impoverished than families headed by a husband and his wife. In 1976, among blacks, 55 percent of the female headed families contrasted to only 16 percent of the male headed families were in poverty (U.S., Bureau of the Census, 1977a: Table 16).

Second, children who are raised in one parent families achieve less as adults than do children raised in husband-wife families. Studies in the 1960s found that, independent of other socioeconomic characteristics of their family of origin, growing up apart from a two-parent family cost a non-white man about one-quarters of a year of schooling (Duncan, Featherman and Duncan, 1972: 64). Replications in the 1970s also demonstrate that blacks from broken families complete fewer years of education than do those who lived with both parents (Hauser and Featherman, 1976) and have lower occupational achievement (Featherman and Hauser, 1976: Table 5).

Third, welfare policies designed to improve economic well-being could be self defeating if they tend to shift individuals into those family statuses associated with low income (Ross and Sawhill, 1975: 3).

This paper describes recent changes in family structure. The trends among blacks are

compared to those among whites and - to gain perspective over a longer span - we considered changes from 1950 to the present.

Demographic Indicators of Family Stability

Most investigators who use the term family stability fail to explicitly define the concept but their discussions focus around the permanence of the living arrangements of married adults, the legitimacy of births and whether children are raised by both parents. On the basis of such observations, we developed the following definition: A stable family system is one in which adults marry, live with their spouse and in which children are born into and raised in such families (Farley and Hermalin, 1971: 2). Demographic tabulations were examined to obtain indicators of each dimension of family stability. Four classes of measures are available:

a. The current marital status of adults

b. The distribution of families by headship and the proportion of men and women who head their own families

c. The proportion of births illegitimate and the rate at which unmarried women bear children

d. the family living arrangements of children

This study is restricted to demographic indicators of family structure and there are no national data which would permit us to assess social or psychological aspects of family structure. We cannot, for example, study bonds of affection or types of emotional support. Demographic data, however, describe the

living arrangements of children and adults and demographic shifts reflect changes in the functioning of family life.

Trends in Family Stability - Marital Status

Information about marital status comes from the decennial censuses and the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. Adults are asked whether they are single - that is, have never married - or if they are currently married, separated, widowed or divorced. Individuals in common law marriages are reported as married (U.S., Bureau of the Census, 1963: xx). For individuals who report themselves currently married, the Census Bureau checks the composition of the household to determine if a spouse shares the domicile. This permits categorization of currently married adults into two groups: married-spouse present and married-spouse-absent. More individuals are in the married-spouse-absent category because of marital discord since, in recent years, about three-quarters of the married-spouse-absent men and two-thirds of the married-spouse-absent women reported they were separated which is generally a prelude to divorce (U.S., Bureau of the Census, 1977b: Table 1). Only a small fraction of the married-spouse-absent women - 3 percent in 1976 - reported they lived apart because of their husband's military duty (U.S., Bureau of the Census, 1977b: Table 1).

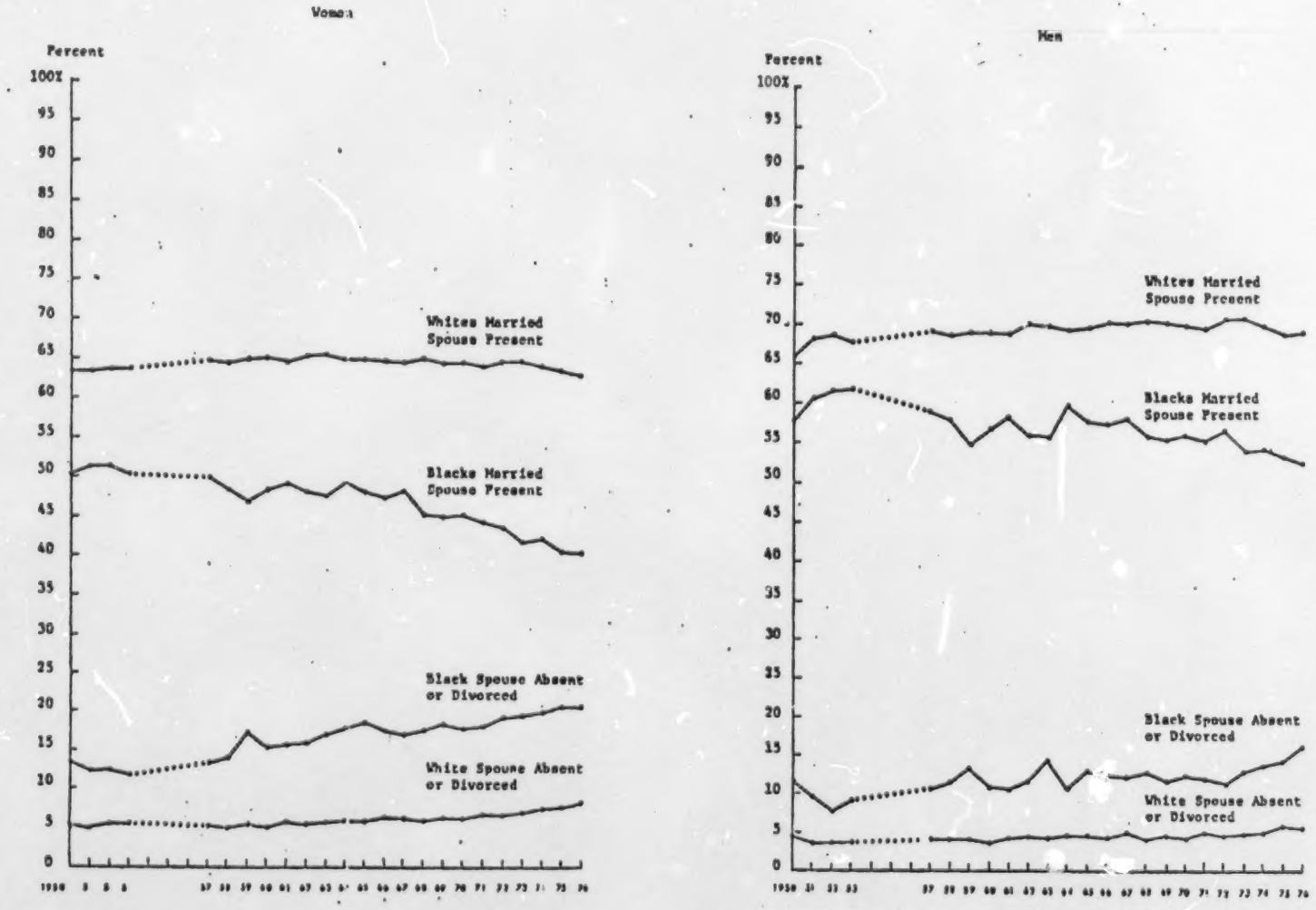
These demographic tabulations provide at least two indicators of marital stability. (For a discussion of other indicators see: Glick, 1970). We can, for instance, examine changes over time in

the proportion of adults who are in the status associated with stability - the proportion of adults married-spouse present - or we can look at shifts in the proportion of adults who live apart from their spouse because of marital discord, that is, the proportion either currently divorced or married-spouse-absent. Figure 1 shows trends over time in these two indicators of family stability. Figures for 1950 were gathered in the decennial census while those for other years come from the Current Population Survey, a monthly sample which now includes 45,000 households (U.S., Bureau of the Census, 1977b: 54). To facilitate the analysis of trends over time, the data have been standardized for age. Whenever possible figures for the white and black or Negro population have been used but until 1968 many tabulations were published for whites and nonwhites only.[1]

- - - Figure 1 - - -

Turning first to data about black men, we observe a trend away from marital stability. The proportion who were married and lived with their wife decreased from about 58 percent in 1950 to 53 percent at present and the proportion who lived apart from their wife because of marital discord rose in a comparable manner, the primary change being a growing proportion reporting they are currently divorced. The proportion in the statuses indicative of marital disruption was about 10 to 12 percent in the 1960s but increased to 15 percent in the mid-1970s.

Figure 1. Proportion of Adults who were Married-Spouse-Present or Living Apart from their Spouse Because of Marital Discord by Race and Sex, 1950 to 1976[a]



a. Data have been standardized for age. Data for 1950 to 1963 and for 1967 refer to whites and nonwhites.

Sources: U.S., Bureau of the Census, Census of Population: 1950, P-E, No. 2D, Tables land 2; Current Population Reports, Series P-20, Nos. 38, 44, 52, 62, 71, 81, 96, 105, 114, 122, 135, 144, 159, 170, 187, 198, 212, 225, 242, 255, 271, 287, and 306.

Trends among black women are similar to those among black men. In 1950, one-half of the nation's adult nonwhite women lived with a husband but by 1976 this declined to about four women in ten. Throughout this period there has been a rise in the share of black women who are currently divorced or married but living apart from their husband. Among these women, the trend away from stability appears to be occurring more rapidly after 1970 than before. That is, the proportion married-spouse-present declined more in the six year period following 1970 than in the preceeding twenty years (See: Glick and Mills, 1974: 2-4).

Trends among whites are less readily summarized. Among white men the fraction who were married and lived with their wife rose from 66 percent in 1950 to 71 percent in the early 1970s and has declined very little. Among white women, the proportion living with their husband has fluctuated within a narrow range and at all dates just under two-thirds of the white women were in this status.

Turning to the other indicator of stability - the proportion who lived apart from a spouse because of marital discord - we see a racial similarity for among both races this has become more common. Among whites this has primarily been a rise in the proportion who are currently divorced whereas among black women there has been an increase in the proportion who are currently married but live apart from their husbands.

Age standardized data may conceal significant age differences

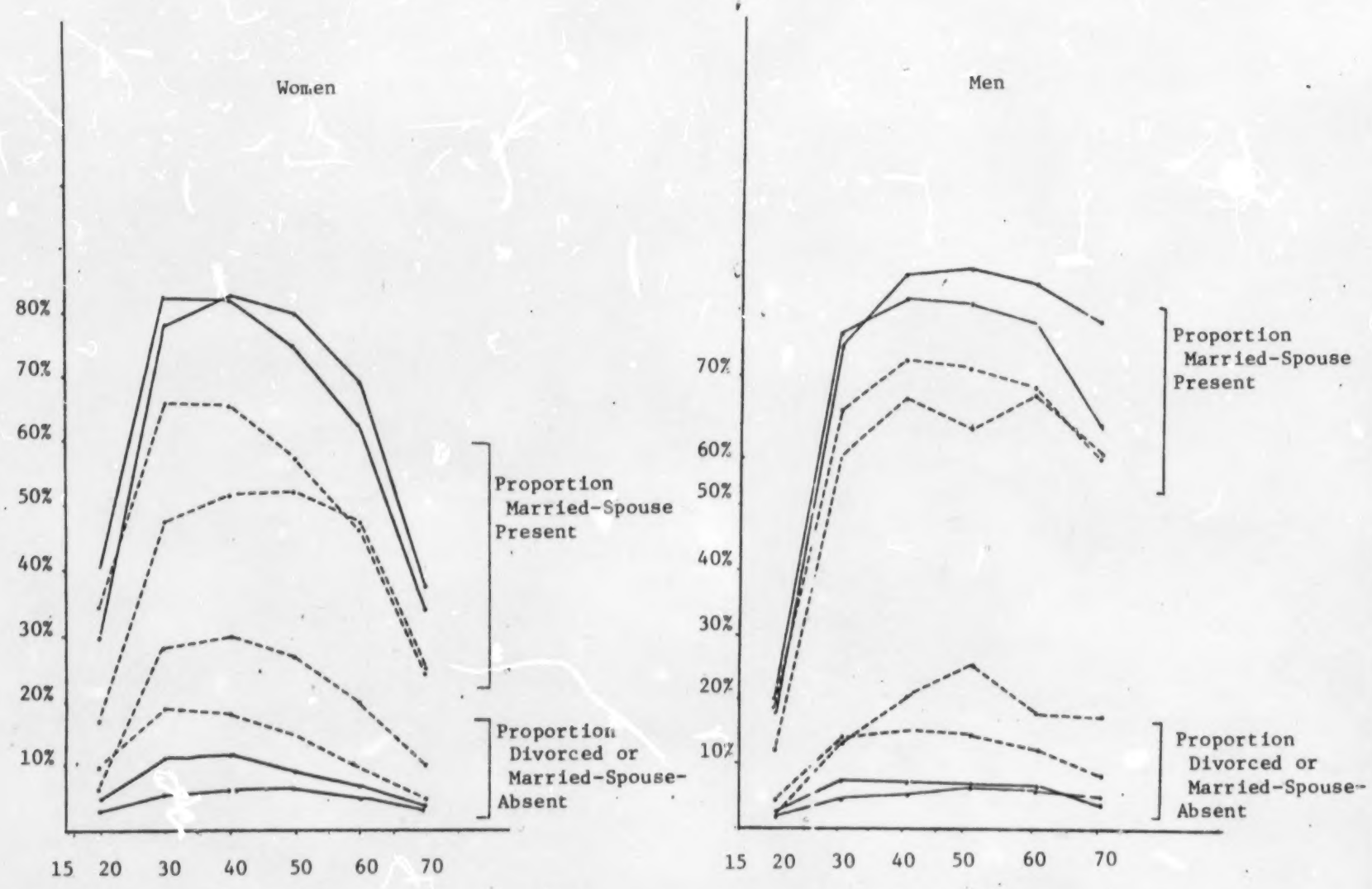
and for that reason Figure 2 presents age-specific information about the indicators of marital status for the earliest and most recent years. Among whites under age 35 there has been a decrease in the proportion in the status associated with stability - the proportion married-spouse-present. However, this has largely been offset by changes at the older ages and whites at ages 40 and over were more likely to be living with a spouse in 1976 than comparably aged whites in 1950. As a result the age standardized data - shown in Figure 1 - reveal very little change over time in the proportion of whites in this status. Trends among blacks are quite distinct and we find that for all but the very oldest ages, the proportion of both men and women who lived with a spouse decreased between 1950 and the mid-1970s.

- - - Figure 2 - - -

Among both races, particularly sharp declines are evident in the proportion of young people who are married and live with a spouse. This reflects the trend away from early marriage. Among whites under age 25 the proportion married-spouse-present is presently lower than any previous date since World War II. Information about the marital status of blacks is available since 1890 and at present a record low proportion of blacks under age 25 live with a spouse.

Turning to the other indicator - the proportion divorced or living apart from a spouse because of marital discord - we observe

Figure 2. Are Specific Proportions in Marital Statuses Indicative of Stability or Instability, Whites and Blacks, 1950 and 1976.



Solid Lines - Whites
Dotted Lines - Blacks

Source: U.S., Bureau of the Census, Census of Population, 1950 P-E, No. 2D, Table, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 306, Table 1.
Data for 1950 Refer to Nonwhites

12

13

increases for both races and both sexes. On this measure, there is a general trend away from marital stability affecting each of the age groups.

The marital status distribution for a given year reflects many decisions about marriage, separation, divorce and remarriage. An investigation of each of those is beyond the scope of this report but several trends deserve comment. The studies of Preston and others demonstrate a secular trend toward increasing divorce. Approximately 20 percent of the marriages contracted in the 1920s ended in divorce but current rates imply that 40 to 50 percent of the marriages of the 1970s will eventually be dissolved by divorce (Preston and McDonald, 1976: 1 and Table 1; Preston, 1975: 457; Carter and Glick, 1970: 54-59; U.S., Bureau of the Census, 1977c: Table 10, Ferris, 1970: 74-80). If increases in the divorce rate are matched by increases in the remarriage rate, then the rise in divorce will not alter the proportion of adults who are currently separated or divorced. However, if the divorce rate rises when the remarriage rate is constant or falling or if the interval between separation and remarriage lenghtens, then the proportion of adults in statuses indicative of marital discord will grow. Norton and Glick (1976: 6-7; Glick and Norton, 1973: 303) show that through 1970 the divorce and remarriage rates rose concurrently but since then the divorce rate has increased more rapidly than the remarriage rate and this may explain why a larger proportion of adults are now divorced or separated, a change which is very evident in both Figures 1 and 2.

In summary, changes in marital status suggest a shift away from family stability as we defined it. Among blacks there are declines in the proportion of adults who are married and live with their spouse and, among whites in the childbearing ages, there has been a similar shift but this has been offset by a rise in the proportion married-spouse-present at older ages. The other indicator - the proportion who are either divorced or living apart from their spouse - has risen among both races. Changes in marital status have been greater among blacks and racial differences are now larger than at previous dates.

Trends in Family Stability - Types of Families and Family Headship

When discussing the break down of black family life, Moynihan noted the high proportion of black families headed by a woman and stressed the untoward consequences. Figure 3 reports trends over time in types of families among whites and nonwhites. The Census Bureau defines a family as two or more individuals who are related by blood, marriage or adoption and who share a housing unit (U.S., Bureau of the Census, 1977b: 53). Families are classified into three types; those which are headed by a married couple, those headed by a woman who does not live with her husband and those headed by a man who does not have a wife present (Glick, 1957: 210-212). The majority of families with a woman as head - 82 percent among blacks and 63 percent among whites in 1976 - include children (U.S., Bureau of the Census, 1977b: Table 1), but some consist of sisters or other adult relative who share a household.

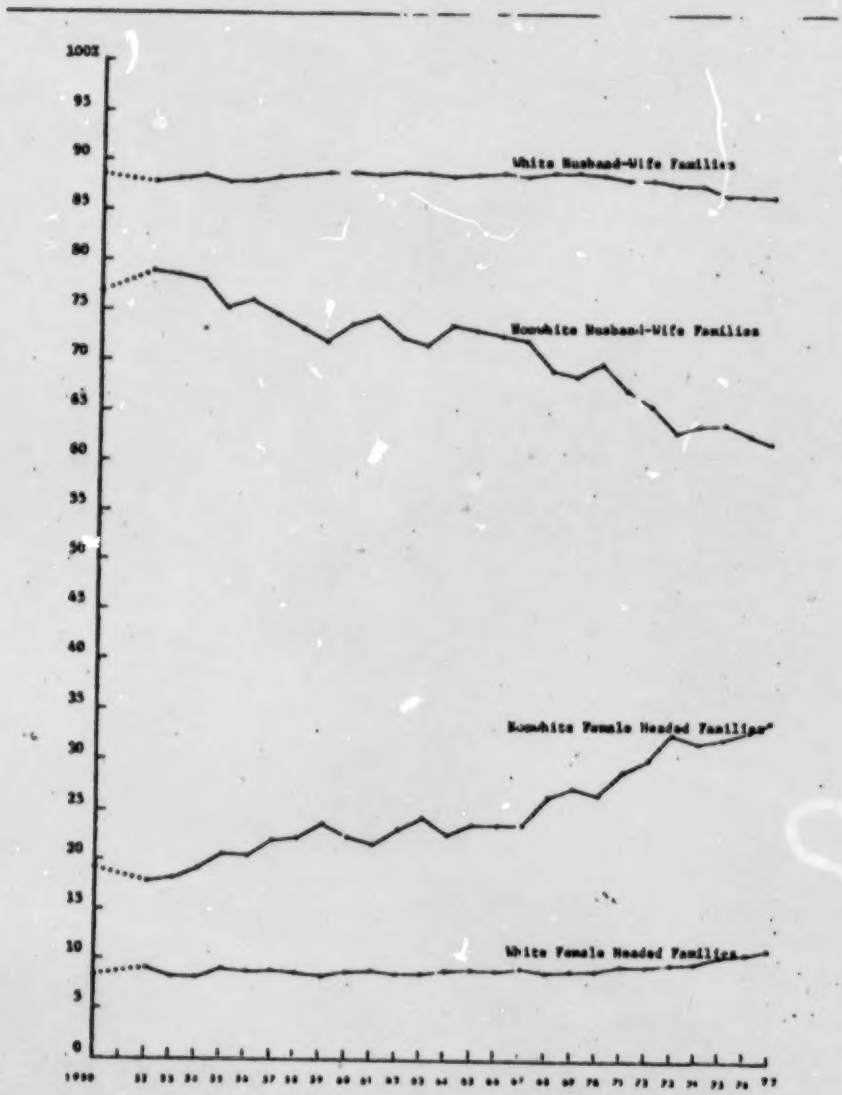
If family type is the indicator of stability, we find a shift away from stable families among both races. Figure 3 shows the proportion of total families which were husband-wife families and the proportion headed by a woman. Trends for families headed by other males are not shown but at each date about 4 percent of the nonwhite and 3 percent of the white families were headed by a man who did not live with his wife.[2]

- - - Figure 3 - - -

Among nonwhites, the proportion of total families containing a married couple declined 7 percentage points between 1950 and 1970, that is, from 77 percent to 70 percent, and then dropped another 8 points after 1970 to 62 percent at present. There has been a corresponding rise in the share of nonwhite families with a female head and, by 1977, more than one nonwhite family in three was headed by a woman. This is higher than during the Depression or any previous date for which data are available (Farley and Hermalin, 1971: Table 3).

Among whites, the distribution of families by type changed little during the two decades following 1950. At each date approximately 88 percent were husband-wife families and 9 percent were headed by a woman. Since 1970 there has been a slight decrease in the proportion husband-wife and a rise in the proportion headed by a woman and, in 1977, 11 percent of the white families were headed by a woman. Among whites - as among nonwhites - the fraction of families with a woman as head appears to be higher now than ever before.

Figure 3. Husband-Wife Families and Female Headed Families as A Proportion of Total Families, 1950 to 1977.



Sources: U.S., Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, Numbers 33, 44 53, 67, 75, 83, 88, 100, 106, 116, 125, 139, 153, 164, 166, 176, 200, 218, 233, 246, 258, 276, 282, and 307.

Changes in family headship reflect alterations in the living arrangements of adults and information about this is presented in Table 1. Since most interest is focused upon the family living arrangements of adults who are rearing children, this analysis is restricted to individuals 18 to 64. This table classifies adults by their relationship to the head of their household. A household includes all persons who reside in one dwelling unit. In households containing related individuals or families, persons are classified as household heads, wives, children of the head or other relatives of the head. Unrelated persons within such households are classified as secondary individuals. In households containing unrelated individuals, one person is classified as the household head and is referred to as the primary individual. Other persons in the household are classified as secondary individuals. People who are not in household are those who live in barrerks, dormitories or other group quarters (U.S., Bureau of the Census, 1977b: 52).

- - - Table 1 - - -

Looking first at data for black women, we observe a decrease in the proportion who live outside regular households or as other relatives of family heads. On the other hand, the proportion heading their own household - be it a family or a household with no relatives - has increased. At least through 1970 these trends offset each other so that the proportion of black women in the

Table 1. Persons 18 to 64 Years Old by Household Status and Race, 1950 to 1976[a]

Household Status	Blacks or Nonwhites				Whites			
	1950[b]	1960[b]	1970	1976	1950	1960	1970	1976
Women								
Heads of Primary Families	11	14	20	26	5	5	7	8
Primary Individuals	6	7	9	10	4	5	6	7
Wives of Heads of Primary Families	51	55	52	45	69	74	74	72
Children of Heads of Primary Families	10	10	8	9	10	8	8	8
Other Relatives of Family Heads	12	9	8	7	6	4	3	3
Secondary Individuals	5	3	2	2	2	1	1	1
Not in Households	5	2	1	1	3	2	1	1
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Men								
Heads of Husband-Wife Primary Families	54	58	59	54	68	74	76	73
Heads of Other Primary Families	3	3	3	3	[illegible]	2	2	2
Primary Individuals	5	7	9	13	3	2	5	8
Children of Heads of Primary Families	11	12	13	16	13	10	12	12
Other Relatives of Family Heads	11	8	7	7	5	3	2	2
Secondary Individuals	7	5	4	4	3	4	1	2
Not in Households	9	7	5	3	6	5	2	1

a. Data have been standardized for age using the distribution of the total population 18 to 64 in 1960 as the standard. The 1950 and 1960 data were obtained from decennial censuses and the 1970 and 1976 data from the Current Population Survey. See sources for a discussion of comparability.

b. Data for 1950 and 1960 refer to nonwhites.

Sources: U.S., Bureau of the Census, Census of Population: 1950; P-E, No. 2D, Tables 1 and 2; Census of Population: 1960, PC(1)-1B, Table 45; PC(2)-4B, Table 2; Current Population Survey, Series P-20, Nos. 212 and 306.

status associated with family stability - that is, living with a husband who headed the household - remained essentially constant. Since 1970 trends are different and there has been a substantial decline in the proportion of adult black women who are wives of family heads. A minority - 45 percent - are now in this status.

Similar changes are evident among white women. The proportion who live outside regular households or as relatives other than wives has declined and the proportion heading their own families or living as primary individuals has risen. Since 1970 there has been a drop in the proportion of white women who are wives of family heads but it is much smaller - both in absolute and relative terms - than the comparable change among blacks.

Turning to data for men, we find that a decreasing share of both blacks and whites live in group quarters, as secondary individuals or as other relatives of household heads and, between 1950 and 1970, a growing proportion headed their own husband-wife families. Since 1970 there has been a fairly sharp rise in the proportion who live as primary individuals and, for the first time since World War II, a decline in the fraction of men who head husband-wife families. The magnitude of these changes is greater among blacks than among whites.

The changing distributions of families by type - shown in Figure 3 - and living arrangements of adults - reported in Table 1 - result from alterations in the marital status of adults and the increasing tendency of women to head their own households

rather than live with husbnads, friends or relatives. Ross and Sawhill contend that economic changes in recent years have made it easier for women to head their own families. They point to three important trends. First, a higher proportion of women work. In 1.66, 40 percent of the women were in the labor force; a decade later, this rose to 48 percent (U.S., Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1977: Table A-2). Second, women who work have larger incomes than in the past. In the last decade, the median income of men, in constant dollars, rose an average of 0.3 percent per year, but that of women, 2.7 percent (U.S., Bureau of the Census, 1977e: Table 10, 12 and 61). Third, welfare payments have increased, restrictions to obtaining welfare have been negated, and an increaseing proportion of those who are eligible actually obtain welfare benefits (Ross and Sawhill, 1975: 94-99).

While there is ambiguity about whether these economic changes in themselves have led to increased marital disruption, it is reasonable to assume that women who experience marital dissolution or who bear an illegitimate child now are more able to head their own families than similar women were twenty five years ago. (For discussions see: Cutright, 1971; Cutright and Madras, 1976: Hannan, Tuma and Groenevelp, 1976). Increases in family headship by women are quite sharp and Table 2 presents information about these trends. Women are classified by marital status and the proportion who headed their own families at each date is shown. Back in 1950, fewer than 30

percent of the women who were divorced or married-spouse-absent were family heads but by 1976, 60 percent of the black and one-half of the white women in these marital disruption statuses headed their own families. In brief, it used to be that once a couple terminated their marriage, the women commonly lived with her own parents or with relatives. Today, she is very likely to head her own family, (Cutright, 1974).

- - - Table 2 - - -

Along with these changes in the propensity to head families, there have been shifts in the age-marital status distribution of female family heads. Women who head families are now younger and more often divorced or separated and less often widowed than in the past (U.S., Bureau of the Census, 1974: 7). Because of these changes, there has been a dramatic increase in the proportion of female family heads who have the responsibility of caring for dependent children.

- - - Table 3 - - -

Table 3 illustrates this point. In 1950, less than half of the black female headed families were comprised of a mother and her children under 18. By 1976, 72 percent of the black women who headed families were raising their own dependent children and an additional 10 percent had the responsibility of caring for related children under 18 (U.S., Bureau of the Census, 1977d: Table 1). For white female family heads, the changes have

Table 2. Proportion of Women who Head Families by Marital Status and Race; 1950 to 1976 for Women 14 and Over

	1950	1960	1970	1976
Black Women[a]				
Single	3.5%	6.1%	9.5%	14.7%
Married-Spouse-Absent	27.6	39.3	50.9	60.7
Divorced	29.9	40.8	52.8	60.3
Widowed	36.2	37.4	37.6	40.5
White Women				
Single	3.3	3.6	3.1	2.9
Married-Spouse-Absent	27.1	32.8	34.0	51.6
Divorced	29.3	36.7	42.1	50.9
Widowed	30.2	25.0	21.7	21.4

a. Data for 1950 and 1960 refer to non-whites.

Sources: U.S., Bureau of the Census, Census of Population: 1950, P-E, No. 2D, Tables 1 and 2; Census of Population: 1960, PC(2)-4B, Table 2; Census of Population: 1970, PC(2)-4B, Table 2; Current Population Survey, Series P-20, No. 306, Table 6.

Table 3. Proportion of Female Family Heads Living with own Children Less Than 18.

	1950	1960	1970	1976
Black Women[a]	47.1%	55.6%	66.6%	71.6%
White Women	32.7%	42.2%	50.7%	58.3%

a. Data for 1950 and 1960 refer to non-whites.

Sources: U.S., Bureau of the Census, Census of Population: 1950, P-E, No. 2 A, Tables 4 and 5; Census of Population: 1960, PC(2)-4A, Table 4; Census of Population: 1970, PC(2)-4A, Table 6; Current Population Survey, Series P-20 No. 34 Table 1.

just as great. In 1950, less than one-third were mothers with children but by 1976, 58 percent of the white female family heads were mothers living with their own children and an additional 5 percent were caring for related children under 18.

The trends described in this section point toward decreased family stability. The proportion of families consisting of a man and his wife has fallen while the proportion headed by a woman has increased and thus a growing fraction of women - black and white - face the challenge of heading a family or a household without a husbnad. The changes in family status have been greater among blacks than whites and racial differences are now larger than ever before.

Trends in Family Stability - Illegitimacy Proportion of Births Illegitimate

Illegitimacy influences family stability in a variety of ways. If a woman becomes premaritally pregnant, her chances for a stable marriage may be lessened (Fustenberg, 1976: 82; Coombs and Zumeta, 1970 U.S., Bureau of the Census, 1976b: Table 9) and if a child is born to a single woman, his or her opportunities to grow up with both parents are diminished.

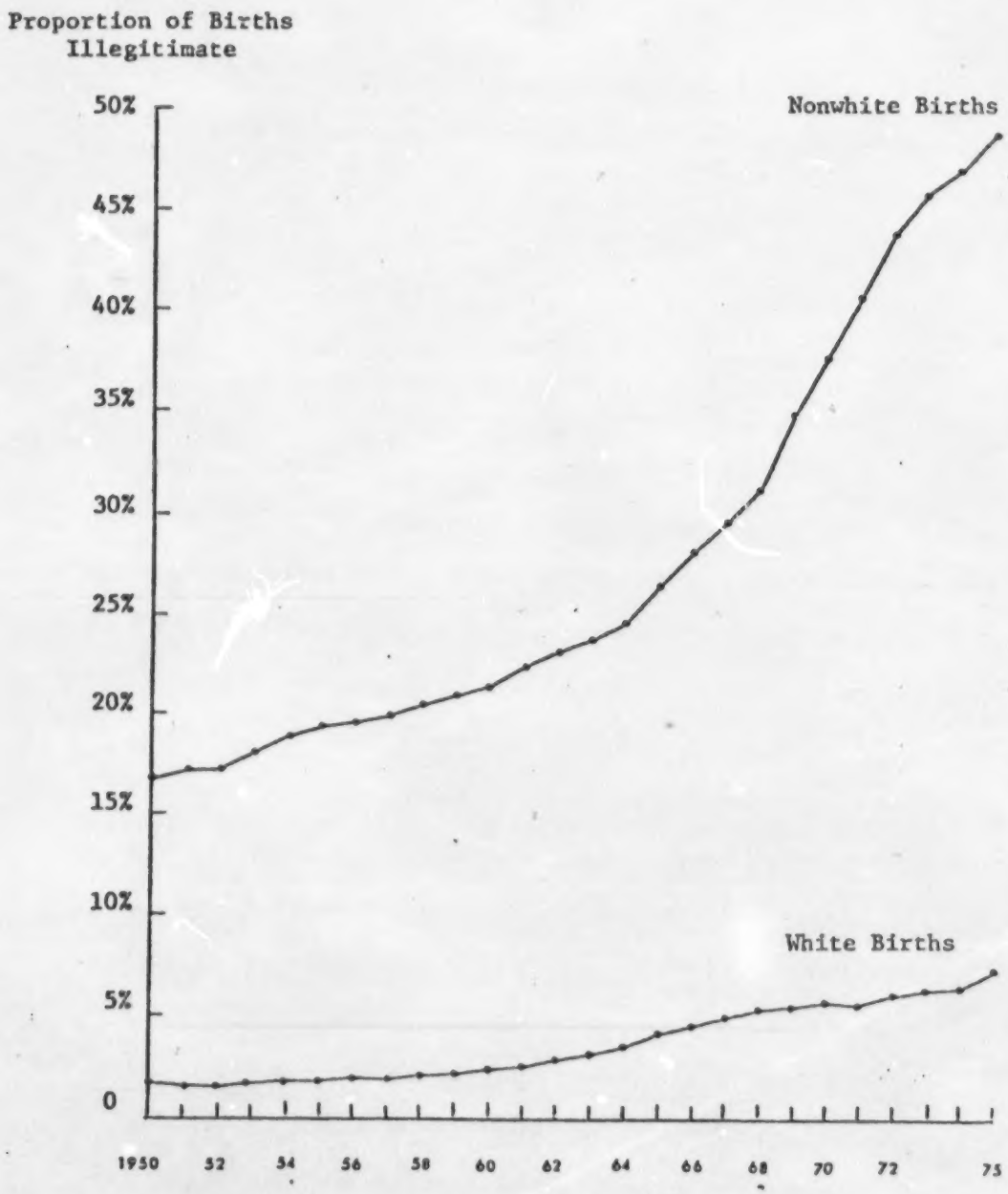
Data about the fertility of unmarried women in the United States are not of high quality (Cutright, 1972: 429-433) and presently only 38 states ascertain legitimacy status (U.S., National Center for Health Statistics, 1976a: Vol. I, 3-11). On the basis of data from reporting areas, the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) develops annual estimates of illegitimate

births by age and race of mother. Only a few studies have investigated the accuracy of these data or whether there are racial or socio-economic differences in reporting and thus illegitimacy trends must be interpreted cautiously (Clague and Ventura, 1968: 72-81).

Figure 4 shows trends in the proportion of births illegitimate among whites and nonwhites and suggests there has been a pronounced shift in the distribution of childbearing in this country. In 1950, about one birth in 25 occurred to an unmarried woman, but in 1975 about one birth in seven was illegitimate. A similar trend is evident for both races, however the increase has been much greater among blacks and, at present, just under one-half of the black births are delivered to unmarried women compared to 7 percent of the white (U.S., National Center for Health Statistics, 1976b: Table 12). These are high levels of illegitimacy. Hartley reports, for example, that the proportion of births illegitimate exceeds 50 percent in only a few Latin American nations and the current proportion illegitimate among United States whites is greater than the level reported in most European nations (Hartley, 1975: Figure 1).

It is puzzling that there should be a sharp rise in illegitimacy in the period since the end of World War II. There have been improvements in birth control techniques and the legalization of abortion. Not only has use of contraception increased but the government has devoted substantial resources to the delivery of

Figure 4. Proportion of Total Births Illegitimate, 1950 to 1975[a].



a. Data for 1969 to 1975 refer to Blacks. For earlier years data refer to nonwhites.

Sources: See U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, Data from the National Vital Statistics System, Series 21, No. 15; Vital Statistics of the United States, 1966-1972, Vol. I; Monthly Vital Statistics Report, Vol. 23, No. 11, Vol. 24, No. 11 Supplement 2; Vol. 25, No. 10.

birth control services (Westoff and Ryder, 1977: Ch.XII; Jaffe and Cutright, 1977: Table 5; Dryfoss, 1976).

As a first step in exploring recent trends, we disaggregated changes in the proportion of births illegitimate. For example, if the fertility rates of married women decrease while those of unmarried women remain constant, a growing proportion of total births will be illegitimate. Or if the proportion of women who are married falls but childbearing rates of married and unmarried women remain fixed, there will be a rise in the proportion illegitimate. To assess the effects of demographic changes, we used the components of difference between two proportions methodology (Kitagawa, 1955). Four components were considered:

a. changes in the legitimate birth rate

b. changes in the illegitimate birth rate

c. changes in the marital status of women

d. changes in the age distribution of women 15 to 44

We calculated age-specific fertility rates by legitimacy status. For each year we began with the NCHS estimates of legitimate and illegitimate births by age of mother. Legitimate births were related to the Census Bureau's estimate of married-spouse-present women and illegitimate births to the number of women in all other marital statuses. We use the term unmarried to refer to women who are eligible to bear illegitimate children.[3]

The results of this decomposition of changes in the proportion of births illegitimate are shown below:

	Components of Change in Proportion of Births Illegitimate 1950 to 1975	
	Black	White
Proportion Illegitimate - 1950	17.9%	1.7%
Proportion Illegitimate - 1975	48.6	7.3
Total Change	+30.7%	+ 5.6%
Change Attributable to:		
Change in Legitimate Fertility Rate	+ 6.4	+ 1.0
Change in Illegitimate Fertility Rate	+ 3.3	+ 1.6
Change in Marital Status	+12.6	+ .5
Change in Age Distribution	+ 1.2	+ .1
Interaction of Factors	+ 7.2	+ 2.4

We discover that decreases over time in the fertility rates of married women played an important role in the overall rise in proportion illegitimate and, among both races, they produced about one-fifth of the observed change. Among blacks, the decreased rate of fertility within marriage was about twice as important as the rise in illegitimate rates in accounting for the shifting distribution of births by legitimacy.

Figure 2 reported that many fewer young women were married and living with their husbands and this shift in marital status had a sizable independent effect upon the proportion of births illegitimate. Changes in marital status - the shift away from the married-spouse-present status - were greater among blacks and so the effects of this variable were greater among blacks. Shifts in the age distribution of women 15 to 44 have also had an effect, albeit a small one, on the proportion of births illegitimate. As a result of the changes in fertility rates,

marital status and age, the annual number of illegitimate births in the mid-1970s was about three times the number recorded a score of year earlier. However, the annual number of legitiamte births fell about 20 percent.

Demographic fluctuations account for much of the change in the distribution of births by legitimacy status and if the fertility of married women continues decline more rapidly than that of unmarried women or if increasing proportions of young women remain single, there will be further rises in the proportion of births occurring out of wedlock.

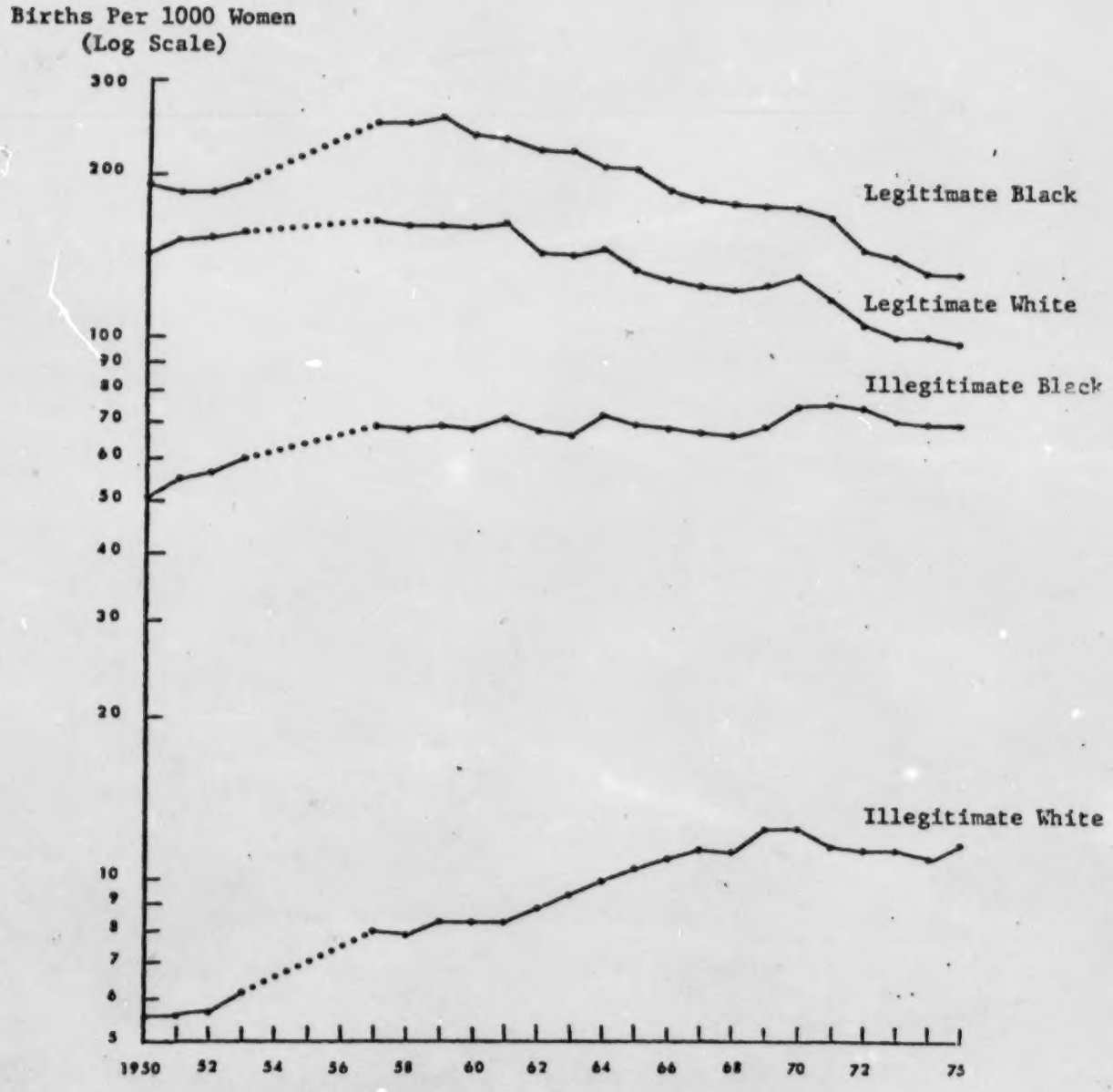
The Fertility Rates of Unmarried Women

Although the distribution of births by legitimacy status is one indicator of family stability, further information may be obtained by analyzing the rate at which unmarried women bear children. This indicator gives a different view of trends in family stability. Illegitimate and legitimate general fertility rates were calculated and these are plotted in Figure 5. The illegitimate general fertility rate for a given year indicates the number of illegitimate births per 1,000 unmarried women 15 to 44 while the legitimate fertility rate shows births per 1,000 married women.

- - - Figure 5 - - -

Among married women, the frequency of childbearing increased rapidly after 1950 and attained a peak in 1957 for whites and the next year for nonwhites. Since that time, childbearing

Figure 5. General Fertility Rates by Legitimacy Status and Race, 1950 to 1975[a]



a. Data for 1950 to 1967 refer to nonwhites.

Source: See Figure 4.

within marriage declined and the rates for both races in 1975 were about 70 percent as great as in 1950.

Fertility rates for unmarried women follow a different pattern. The highest rates were reached at later dates and the recent declines have been much smaller. Among both whites and nonwhites there have been modest decreases but, in 1975, the illegitimate general fertility rates were much higher than comparable rates twenty-five years earlier, indeed the white rate in 1975 was twice that of 1950 and the black rate about 40 percent greater.

An examination of age-specific rates reveals that there has been a substantial decrease in legitimate fertility among women 25 and older of both races and smaller declines among younger women. A similar but delayed trend typifies the childbearing of unmarried women. Since the late 1960s, the fertility of these women over 24 declined substantially, that of women 20 to 24 has fallen modestly but the fertility rates of unmarried teenagers have increased (Ventura, 1977).

The changes described in this section give a mixed picture of trends in family stability. There has been a rapid rise in the number and proportion of births illegitimate. To the extent that there are welfare and health problems associated with illegitimacy - and most stuides suggest that there are such problems (Berkov and Sklar, 1976) - a growing fraction of the nation's children will be affected by these difficulties. Although the

proportion illegitimate has risen among both races, the increases have been greater among blacks and the racial difference on this measure has widened.

The indicator of family stability based upon the rate at which unmarried women bear children may lead to different inferences. Fertility rates among unmarried black and white women 20 and over have fallen a bit since the late 1960s. It may be that the greater use of contraception and abortion which reduced the fertility of married women during the 1950s and 1960s is now having a similar consequence for the childbearing of unmarried women over 20 (Sklar and Barkov, 1974a: Table 4; 1974b: Table 2). Among unmarried teenagers, there has been some rise in the use of contraception but there apparently has been a much greater increase in sexual activity. Zelnik and Kantner estimate that during the early 1970s the proportion of unmarried teenagers who were sexually active but never used contraceptives rose from 6 to 10 percent and this may help to account for the rising illegitimate birth rate at the youngest ages (Zelnik and Kantner, 1977: Tables 3 and 9).

Trends in Family Stability - The Living Arrangements of Young Children

The final indicator of family stability concerns whether children live with their own parents or in some other arrangement. This is of interest since, as Moynihan argued and as subsequent

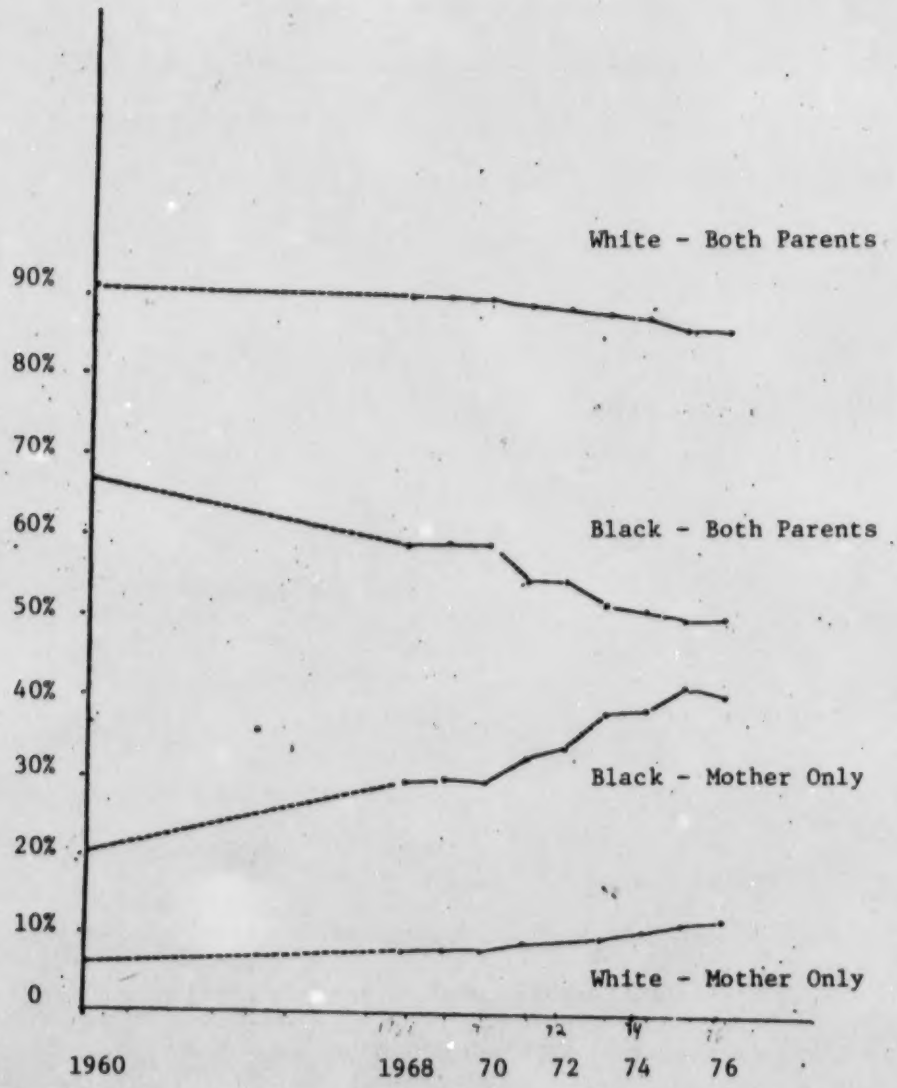
investigations showed, growing up apart from both parents restricts a child's socioeconomic achievement (for a summary of findings see: Ross and Sawhill, 1975: Ch. 6).

Census Bureau tabulations provide limited information about the living arrangements of children. For centain dates between 1950 and 1976, we can determine the types of households in which children lived and, for dates between 1960 and the present, we can ascertain the family living arrangements of children. This latter information appears most pertinent to the issue of family stability.

--- Figure 6 ---

Figure 6 shows the proportion of children under 18 who either lived with both of their parents - real or adoptive - or lived with their mother only; that is, they lived in a family which did not include their father. These data have been standardized for age to take account of the shifting age distribution of children.

Figure 6. Proportion of Children Under 18 Living With Both Parents or With Their Mother Only by Race, 1960 to 1976[a].



Source: U.S., Bureau of the Census, Census of Population 1960, PC(2)-4B, Table 1, 2 and 19; Current Population Reports, Series P-20, Nos. 187, 198, 212, 225, 242, 255, 271, 287 and 306.

This figure succinctly portrays the very large racial difference on this indicator of family stability. At all dates, a much higher proportion of white than black children lived in families with both their parents while the proportion living with only their mother was higher for blacks than for whites.

If we assume that living with both parents is indicative of family stability, then we observe a movement away from stability among both races. About 90 percent of the white children in 1960 lived with both parents but by 1976, this had fallen to 86 percent. A much greater shift occurred among blacks and the decline was from about two-thirds of the children in families with both parents in 1960 to just under one-half in 1976. The major offsetting change has been the increaseing propensity of children to live in families which include their mother but not their father. In 1976, 40 percent of the black children under 18 and 12 percent of the white were in such living arrangements. There have been small fluctuations in the proportion of children living with their father only and at all dates about one percent of the whtie and 2 percent of the black children were in this status. Since 1960 there has been a modest decline in the proportion who live with neither parent but the racial difference in this indicator of family stability remains very large. About 9 percent of the black contrasted to 2 percent of the white children live with neither their father not their mother. (U.S., Bureau of the Census, 1977b: Table 5).

We reported that an increasing share of adults are divorced and that a growing fraction of children are born to unmarried women. As a result, there has been a rise in the proportion of children who live with a divorced or single mother rather than with both parents. The figures below show the average annual change, from 1968 to 1976, in the number of black and white children living in specific arrangements (U.S., Bureau of the Census 1977a: Tables 4 and 5; 1969: Tables 4 and 9).

	Average Annual Percentage Change, 1968 to 1976 in the Number of Children Under Age 18	
	Black	White
Total Number of Children	- .4 %	- 1.2 %
Living in Families with Both Parents	- 2.4	- 1.8
Living in Families with Mother Only		
Total	+ 3.6	+ 4.1
Single Mother	+10.3	+14.0
Married-Spouse-Absent Mother	+ 1.3	+ 2.5
Divorced Mother	+ 8.4	+ 8.4
Widowed Mother	- 1.8	- 2.4
Living in Families with Father Only	- 4.6	+ 1.7
Living with Neither Parent	- 2.5	- 1.9

During this span the total number of children declined because of the downturn in fertility rates. The number living with both parents decreased even more rapidly reflecting the changing marital status of adults, a change which is most evident among blacks. The number of children living in families with their mother only rose, largely because more children are with divorced mothers. The

number in this status has increased about 8 percent annually among both races. There is an even higher growth rate for the number of children living with a single mother - in excess of 10 percent each year. This is still an uncommon occurrance among whites but it is rather frequent among blacks. That is, about 9 percent of the nation's black children under 18 and one-half of one percent of the white in 1976 lived with a single mother (U.S., Bureau of the Census, 1977b: Table 4 and 5).

Changes in the living arrangements of young children imply a trend away from family stability among both races. On this measure also, the changes are greater among blacks than among whites and the racial differences, which were very large in 1960, have increased.

Summary and Conclusion

We defined a stable family system as one in which adults marry and live with their spouses and in which children are raised by both parents. Most of the demographic changes of the last two decades imply a shift away from this traditional type of family organization. Six specific conclusions about family stability may be stated.

First, age at marriage has risen and a relatively large fraction of young people are remaining single until they reach their mid or late twenties. This necessarily reduces the number of years adults spend in the statuses associated with family stability.

Second, a growing proportion of marriages are dissolved by divorce and, as a result numerous adults live for at least some time as separated or divorced individuals. The proportion living with a spouse has declined and by the mid-1970s only a minority of black women lived with a husband.

Third, a rapidly increasing proportion of the nation's births occur to unmarried women. This comes about because of delayed marriage and because the childbearing rates of those women who are married have declined sharply.

Fourth, substantial changes in family headship have taken place. A growing share of women head their own families or head households which contain only non-relatives rather than living with a husband. Among men, there has been a modest decrease in

the proportion living with a wife and an offsetting rise in the proportion living by themselves or with non-relatives.

Fifth, a declining share of children live in families which contain both their parents. Because of more frequent marital disruption and more common illegitimacy, children today are much more likely to be living with their mother only than were children in the past.

Sixth, Moynihan was incorrect in asserting that the trend away from family stability was restricted to blacks. On almost all of these indicators, changes among whites parallel those among blacks, but the shift away from stability has been much greater among blacks. In 1950, the racial difference on these indicators was large but the differentials have widened and blacks and whites are now less alike with regard to family structure than in the past.

Numerous studies have analyzed the consequences of family disorganization for children (Ross and Sawhill, 1976: Chap. 6). Although the evidence is mixed, there seem to be liabilities assoicated with family instability. If nothing else, there are economic liabilities. In 1975, mean income per family member in white families headed by a woman was only 63 percent that for members of white families headed by a married couple - $3,174 per family member compared to $5,108. For black families headed by a woman, per capita income was only 53 percent that of black husband-wife families - $1,684 per family member compared to $3,194

(U.S., Bureau of the Census, 1977e: Table 2. For comparable evidence from a longitudinal study see: Hoffman, 1977).

Moynihan focused attention upon the structure of black families because he believed that family instability was a primary cause of racial differences in social and economic achievement. He was widely criticized for describing the black family as if it were pathological and inherently unstable. A variety of studies conducted in the ensuing decade suggest that if the aim is to minimize racial gaps in economic status, stabalizing black families will be far less effective than eliminating racial differences in pay rates or breaching those barriers which limit black occupational achievement (Duncan and Duncan, 1969; 277; Duncan, Featherman and Duncan, 1972: 62-66; Featherman and Hauser, 1976: Tables 5 and 6).

In their efforts to refute Moynihan, critics overlooked one fundamental fact - family living arrangements are intimately tied to economic well-being and the family is society's basic mechanism for transfering wealth from earners to dependents. It is not necessary to argue that single parent families are pathological or even unstable in order to recognize that single parents are typically not as well off as a married couple and that children raised by one parent will generally not receive as many time and money inputs as children raised by both their parents. The shift away from family stability- which is revealed by the demographic data - implies

that society is moving away from a family system which maximized the economic well-being of women and children toward one which appears to minimize their economic well-being but maximizes that of men.

FOOTNOTE

[1]The absence of data for blacks for some years presents a problem since the family status of those nonwhites who are not blacks differs greatly from that of blacks. In 1976, for example, 19 percent of the black women but only 9 percent of the nonwhite women who were not black reported they were divorced or married and living apart from their husband (U.S., Bureau of the Census, 1977b: Table 1). Among blacks, 49 percent of the births in 1975 were illegitimate but among other nonwhites, only 15 percent were out-of-wedlock (U.S., National Center for Health Statistics, 1976b: Tables 6 and 12).

On solution to this difficulty is to present time series data for whites and nonwhites but most interest has been focused upon the family structure of blacks and, as the Oriental and Indian populations grow, data for nonwhites becomes less indicative of blacks. A better solution would be to assemble data for blacks at all dates but prior to the late 1960s most federal agencies did not separately tabulation informaiton for blacks.

[2]Data in Figure 3 pertain to primary families, that is, families in which the head of the family is also the head of the household.

[3]This procedure from that of NCHS since they do not use married-spouse-absent women in the denominator of their illegitimate fertility rates. (U.S., National Center for Health Statistics, 1976a: 3-11).

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